



# How to Grade for Learning

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## Ideas from Ken O'Connor

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- How to Grade for Learning
- A Repair Kit for Grading, 15 Fixes for Broken Grades
- Workshop at ATI (Assessment Training Institute)



In other words.....

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DON'T  
SHOOT  
THE  
MESSENGER!!!!

(THAT'S ME!) 😊



# Grades

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- Why do we have them?
- What does a grade mean?
- Do they help students learn?
- Are they motivational?



# Reflect on your own practices

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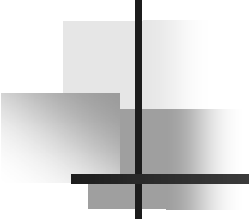
- What are the principles on which your grading practices are based?
- What were or are the main influences on your grading principles & practices?
- How do these compare with other teachers at your school?



# Calculate this student's grade after ten assignments:

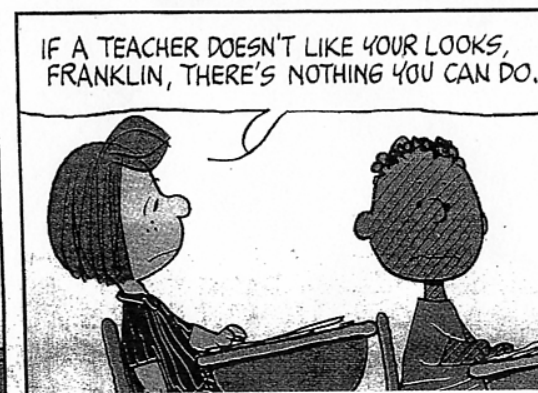
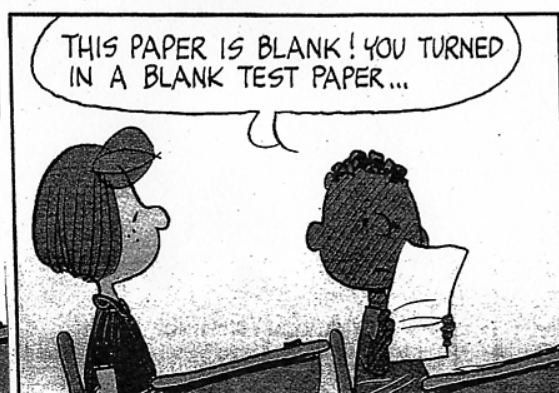
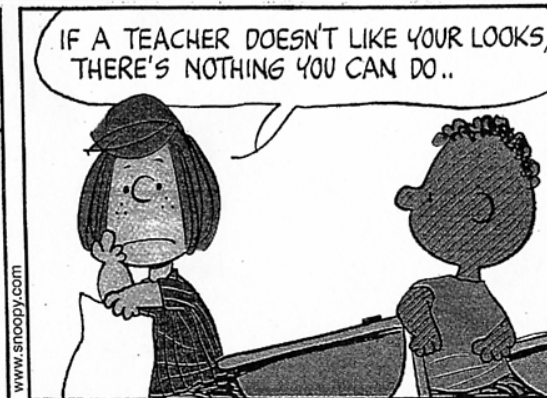
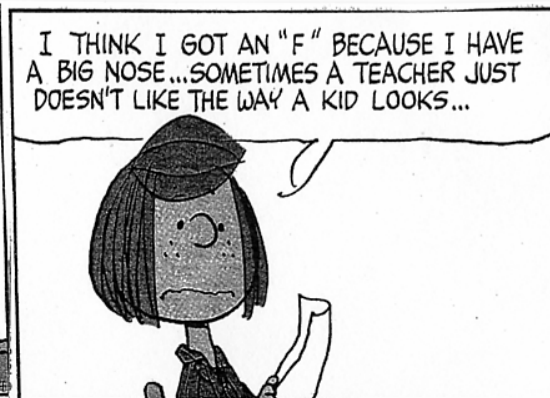
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- C
- C
- NTI (not turned in)
- D
- C
- B
- NTI
- NTI
- B
- A

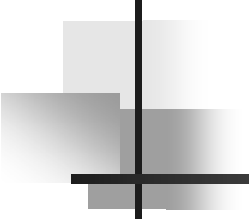


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Learning can (and does)  
happen in the absence  
of grades!







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“Perhaps the most counterproductive aspect of schooling as we know it is the conventional system of letter grades. The problem with grades is not the use of symbols, but the absence of any DEFENSIBLE plan for coming up with the symbol... most grades reflect what is easy to count and average into a final grade.”

- Grant Wiggins



## O'Connor's 7 perspectives underlying grading

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- Grading is not essential for learning.
- Grading is complicated.
- Grading is subjective & emotional.
- Grading is inescapable.
- Grading has a limited research base.
- Grading has no single best practice.
- Grading that is faulty damages students and teachers!

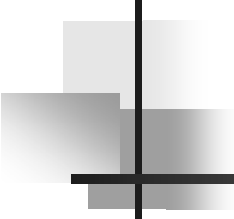


# Do grades motivate learners?

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If grades are extrinsic motivators,  
they can destroy intrinsic  
motivation.


Good grades may motivate, but  
poor grades have no motivational  
value.



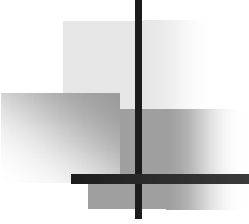
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“Low grades push students farther from our cause, they don’t motivate students. Recording a D on a student’s paper won’t light a fire under that student to buckle down and study harder. It actually distances the student further from us and the curriculum, requiring us to build an emotional bridge to bring him or her back to the same level of investment prior to receiving the grade.”

-Guskey (documented by Guskey and Bailey)

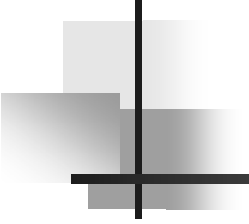


O'Connor's "15 Fixes" for our  
grading system (from his  
book A Repair Kit for  
Grading).



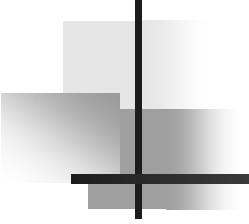
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#1 - Don't include student behaviors (effort, participation, polite manners, etc.) in grades; include only achievement.



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#2 - Don't reduce marks on late work; provide support for the learner.

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- If our job as teachers is to help students learn, why do we care WHEN they learn it? Isn't doing the work LATE better than NEVER?
  - Students should be given opportunities for “re-dos” to learn from their mistakes.

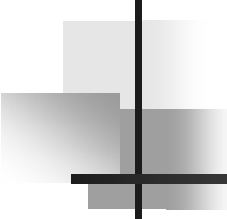




# Some possible solutions?

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- Take a few points off for every day an assignment is late, but not a whole grade. A whole grade lower is punitive, a few points off is instructive.
- Record two grades: one that represents his level of mastery and one that reflects the late penalties.



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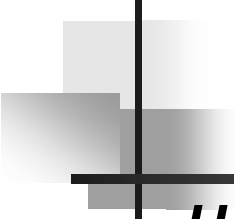
#3- Don't give points for extra credit work or use bonus points; seek only evidence that more work has resulted in a higher level of achievement.



## Extra credit?

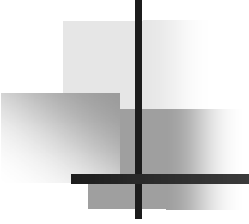
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- How can they do “extra” when they haven’t done the “regular”? - R. Wormeli



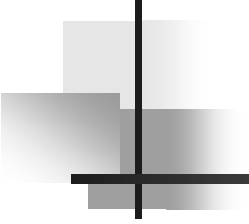
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#4- Don't punish academic dishonesty with reduced grades; apply other consequences and reassess to determine actual level of achievement.



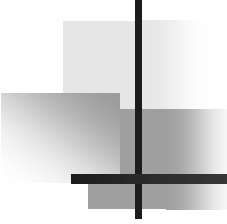
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#5 - Don't consider attendance in grade determination; report absences separately.



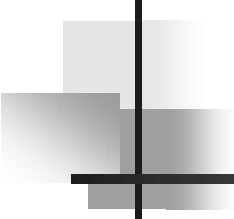
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#6- Don't include group scores in grades; use only individual achievement evidence.



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#7 - Don't organize information in grading records by assessment methods or simply summarize into a single grade; organize and report evidence by standards/learning goals.

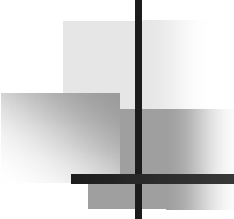


# Relate grading procedures to learning goals

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- What are the key ideas students should know at the end of a unit?
- Tell them!
- Keep track of whether they know it and how well they know it.
- How to report this?





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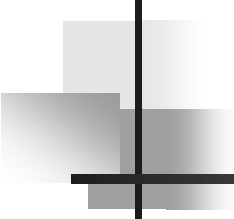
#8 - Don't assign grades using inappropriate or unclear performance standards; provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations.



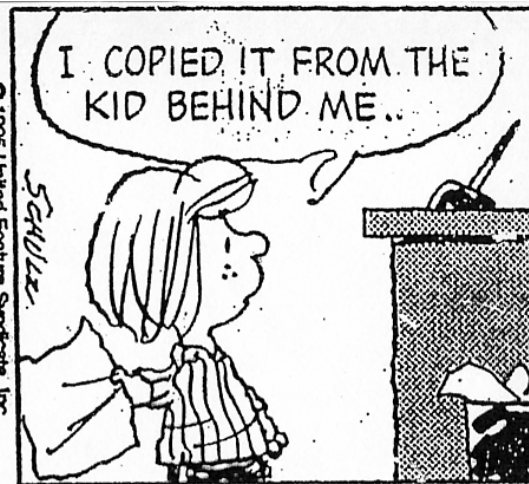
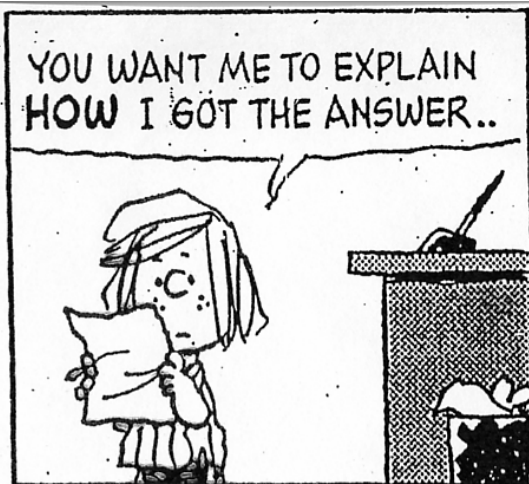
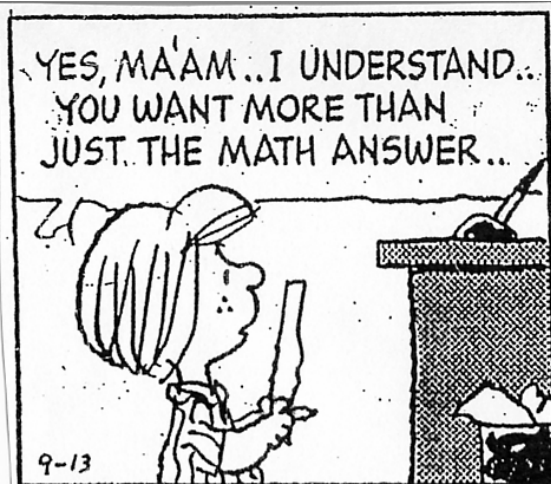
# Use exemplars

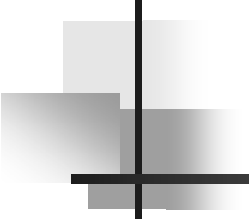
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“Show us what good work looks like and what we have to do to get there.” - 8 yr. old (O'Connor)



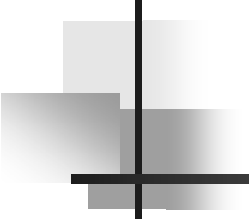
#9 - Don't assign grades based on student's achievement compared to other students; compare each student's performance to preset standards.





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#10- Don't rely on evidence gathered using assessments that fail to meet standards of quality; rely only on quality assessments.

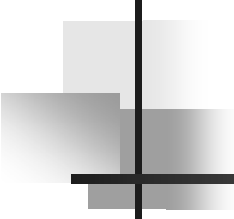


#11 - Don't rely only on the mean; consider other measures of central tendency and use professional judgment.



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Ask math teachers what else  
there is... median, mode....



#12- Don't include zeros in grade determination when evidence is missing or as punishment; use alternatives, such as reassessing to determine real achievement or use "I" for Incomplete or Insufficient Evidence.

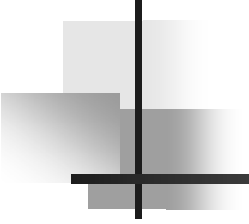




# Zeros kill averages!

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- 90-100 = A (10 points)
- 80-89 = B (9 points)
- 70-79 = C (9 points)
- 60-69 = D (9 points)
- 0-59 = F (59 points!)
- It is almost impossible to overcome many zeros in a grading period.
- If our lowest score was a 50, many would still fail, but many more would believe they can overcome their low averages.



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**#13- Don't use information from formative assessments and practice to determine grades; use only summative evidence.**



# Sample student performance

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- Do not grade everything!
- If we want kids to grow and learn throughout a unit, most grades should come from the end of the unit when mastery should happen.
- Grades should reflect “latest learning”, not how confused the student was at the start.



# Homework is practice!

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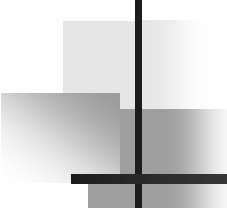
- Students should make mistakes as they are learning and not be afraid to learn from their mistakes.
- Homework is practice - where mistakes should happen. Their mistakes should not be graded.
- FEEDBACK on homework is shown to be most effective.
- Grade (if graded at all) on attempt only, not mastery.

## Homework Rubric:

# Homework

- |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (4) | Homework is complete<br>Presentation is exceptionally neat, detailed, and organized<br>Few to no errors corrected in red pen                                                                            |
| (3) | Homework is complete<br>Presentation is legible<br>Errors corrected in red pen                                                                                                                          |
| (2) | Homework is mostly complete but may be missing problems<br>Presentation may be careless and disorganized<br>Errors may not be corrected in red pen<br>Errors and problems not completed done in red pen |
| (1) | Homework is not completed<br>Missing work is done in red pen                                                                                                                                            |
| (0) | No work turned in                                                                                                                                                                                       |

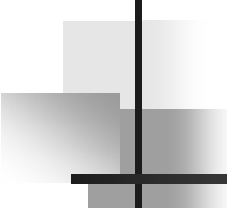




After reviewing 8000 studies, a researcher made the following comment:

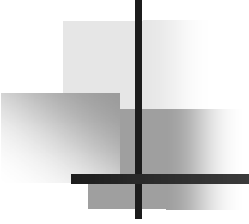
“ The  
most powerful single  
modification that enhances  
achievement is FEEDBACK.  
The simplest prescription for  
improving education must be  
‘dollops of feedback’.”

-Classroom Assessment & Grading that Work - Robert J. Marzano (2006)



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#14 - Don't summarize evidence accumulated over time when learning is developmental and will grow with time and repeated opportunities; in those instances, emphasize more recent achievement.



#15 - Don't leave students out of the grading process. Involve students; they can- and should- play key roles in assessment and grading that promote achievement.





# One final thought....

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*“If you wanted to make JUST ONE change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most effective place to start would be challenging prevailing grading practices.”*

*-Douglas B. Reeves, Ed. Leadership/February 2008, pg. 85*



# Action Plan!

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- Reflecting on your own practices, what is ONE SMALL thing you could change to promote more learning in your grading practices?



# Bibliography

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- How To Grade For Learning - Ken O'Connor
- A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades - Ken O'Connor
- Classroom Assessment & Grading that Work - Robert Marzano
- Fair Isn't Always Equal - Rick Wormeli
- Integrating Differentiated Instruction & Understanding by Design - Carol Ann Tomlinson & Jay McTighe
- How to Teach so Students Remember - Marilee Sprenger
- Grading - Susan Brookhart
- Mindset - Carol Dweck
- The Assessment Training Institute: [www.ets.org/ati](http://www.ets.org/ati)



# Thank you!

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